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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SOFIA 001183

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KV](#) [SR](#) [BG](#)
SUBJECT: BULGARIANS NERVOUS OVER KOSOVO UDI

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Classified By: Ambassador Beyrle for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Our recent high-level contacts with Bulgarian leaders on Kosovo reveal increased nervousness over a likely UDI in December, some softening of opposition to partition, and a clear reluctance to be in the early group of European states that would recognize Kosovo post-UDI. Bulgaria has been a strong supporter of Ahtissari and early resolution of status, but shares our pessimism over the likelihood of any happy ending before December 10. Given the harder lines taken by Athens and Bucharest, we need to keep Sofia better plugged in to our evolving strategy and tactics to ensure Bulgaria's their resolve -- as a key NATO/EU player in the Balkans -- does not drift. End summary.

12. (C) The Ambassador met PM Stanishev and President Parvanov on successive days (Sept. 26 and 27), inter alia to discuss U.S. views and preview possible Kosovo developments. The Ambassador underscored that we continue to support the Troika process, but believe prospects for success are slim. We had been prepared to recognize Kosovar independence in June, but the President was persuaded to wait after discussions with our European partners, including Bulgaria. But clearly Russia was not prepared to engage constructively; the Kosovars should not be expected to wait forever. If there is no resolution by December 10, we need to be prepared for Kosovo to declare independence very soon thereafter. The U.S. would be prepared to recognize Kosovo, and we believed that major EU powers -- France, the UK and Germany would follow suit. Partition was not an option, and KFOR would need to stay engaged.

PM Stanishev : EU unity is the key

13. (C) The PM said he was not an optimist that we could achieve the best outcome, which would be an internationally recognized solution that would allow us to overcome the differences within NATO and EU allies. In this respect, he urged the United States to "be as persuasive as possible" with the major EU players -- there was no desire within Europe to repeat the experience of 2003, with "old and new Europe" at odds. Stanishev agreed there was no will in Moscow to look for a workable compromise; the Russians are in a win-win situation from the point of view of their own short-term interests.

14. (C) Partition was the worst outcome; "we can partition and partition every Balkan country until eternity." In Serbia, there was no willingness to discuss status, and they were putting no effort into the debate on standards. But the EU needed to develop a strategy for Serbia -- even though everyone recognized they would not become EU members soon -- with a focus on things like economic assistance, humanitarian contacts, and visa facilitation. Europe would pay a high price for failure to be proactive on Serbia, because there

are enough radicals and extremists both in Serbia and Kosovo.

It was important for Bulgaria to keep communications lines open with Belgrade, and thus it "would be difficult to be among the first" to recognize Kosovo

President Parvanov: Could Partition "Lessen the Blow"?

¶5. (C) President Parvanov made similar points -- with an important divergence on the issue of partition. He stated matter-of-factly that it would have been better to recognize Kosovo independence in May/June; whatever the consequences then, it would have been less painful than what is now shaping up. He recalled his meeting with Putin at the June energy summit in Zagreb (two weeks after President Bush visited Sofia) when Putin was quite hard. Since then, the Kostunica-Tadic relationship and internal Serbian politics had yielded no genuine movement on the Serbs part. For Bulgaria, independence outside of a UNSCR would be hard to support; Bulgaria would not be among the first to recognize an independent Kosovo. Bulgaria remains a strong KFOR supporter.

¶6. (C) Noting increased European indecisiveness and hesitation, and making a brief reference to Ischinger's musings on partition, Parvanov said mixed signals make a solution harder. In Serbia, there are some voices for the partition of Kosovo; while many do not believe partition may be possible or feasible, they can accept it. Russia, too, would accept such a division, Parvanov stated flatly. What motives the Russians have, in addition to those they state openly on Kosovo, are open to interpretation. Perhaps if some Serb municipalities in Kosovo can "save face," it could lessen the blow in Serbia. But the overall situation was hard. Parvanov recalled his discussion with Kostunica where

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he had threatened to break off diplomatic relations with any country that recognized Kosovo; Parvanov counseled against doing something Serbia would regret.

Comment

¶7. (C) The Bulgarian position on Kosovo has been steady: resolve status sooner, rather than later; support the Ahtissari plan; keep lines to Belgrade open and offer concrete European incentives. None of this has changed. But as the Troika process grinds on and the likelihood of a UDI in December increases, their opposition to partition looks to be softening a bit. Both the President and FM Kalfin (reftel) have now both discussed partition with us as a conceivable (if undesirable) outcome. Also, it appears that without some prodding from us -- ideally backed up with encouragement from Berlin, Paris or London -- Sofia will see no advantage to joining an early wave of EU countries to recognize, post UDI. With Romania and Greece likely to resist recognition for as long as possible, the advantage of keeping at least one NATO/EU member in the Balkans close to us is evident. Putin's likely visit to Sofia in January will also influence the Bulgarian calculus, unhelpfully. We recommend that Sofia be made a stop on any diplomatic swings planned through the region in the coming weeks/months as we approach the endgame in the Troika process. End Comment.

Beyrle